

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Energy Management: Doing More with Less

Working longer and harder may not be the best way to accomplish more. In fact, there may be ways to work more effectively. Understanding and accepting the fact that you have to change the way you work may be the vital key to coping with increased pressures and heavier workloads.

One thing that can have a major influence on workplace stress is energy management. Most people have heard plenty about time management and stress management, but energy management may be a relatively new concept.

Anne McGee-Cooper is the author of *You Don't Have To Go Home Exhausted!* and a leading authority on "Energy Engineering." She first became interested in the subject when her Dallas-based firm found that teaching clients to manage time was not enough. They could teach their clients how to budget time for a project, but if the client didn't have the necessary energy, the project dragged on, or was done in a mediocre way.

McGee-Cooper also points out that energy management is not the same as stress management. "Although stress can definitely be a factor in low energy," she says, "getting stress under control does not necessarily result in sustained high energy levels and increased motivation."

Energy Strategies

Here are some energy strategies worth considering:

Match your energy to the task. Most people's energy levels peak between 9 a.m. and noon. Yet many people waste this time on trivial tasks. Try planning your next day's work at the end of the previous day, and place simple, repetitive tasks in a time slot when your energy level is lower.

Have an enthusiastic attitude. It can be difficult to have energy and enthusiasm for work you've been doing for years. Many jobs are repetitive—even jobs that are seen as glamorous. Think about how many times an actor says the same lines, or a singer sings the same song. Yet they must keep their enthusiasm high to please their audiences. How do they do it? They simply treat each performance as if it was their first. And this is a rule that can be applied to any job.

Take a break. Use breaks as periodic energy replenishments and as rewards for completing a task. Even if skipping a break to get something done quickly seems commendable at the time, it may prove to be counter-productive. Not replenishing yourself can result in careless errors and inefficiency caused by low energy levels.

Be positive. Focus on the positive aspects of each workday. Rather than reviewing all the negative events of the day or discussing them over dinner, choose to focus on the positive. This can go a long way toward making work feel less draining. It will also make for better moods and conversation at home.

Plan ahead. Take one day at a time. Proper scheduling of projects can get them off your mind and on to the pages of a planner. Avoid putting needless pressure on yourself by continually thinking about what needs to be done this week, month or even this year. Instead, tackle these projects one at a time when their scheduled time arrives.

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Try visualization. Visualize yourself working more effectively. Psychologists tell us that visualization works because the human brain can't tell the difference between a real experience and one that is imagined. Visualization actually serves as a kind of practice for successful completion of tasks. Visualizing yourself working in a more relaxed, confident manner will help you conform to that self-image in reality.

Make the most of lunchtime. Avoid the midday slump. Poor food choices or simply grabbing a sandwich while you continue to work can leave you feeling sluggish for the afternoon. Take a proper lunch break.

Balance work and leisure. After a stressful or busy week, try to devote at least one day to rest and relaxation. Then, when you return to work, you won't be running on empty.

Try synergy. This theory is based on the premise that an enthusiastic attitude toward one area of life will spread to other areas. For instance, if you find you are bored and tired by Wednesday each week. Try injecting another activity into your life on Wednesday or Thursday that will give you something to look forward to. A high-energy attitude toward another activity will spill over into your working life.

The benefits of energy management reach beyond better performance in the workplace. Energy management can also have effects on long-term health and well-being.